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VITAL SIGNS

# Screening: Breast Cancer History Is a Two-Sided Family Tree

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Doctors who screen women to determine their risk for [breast cancer](#) should question them more closely about the history of the disease on their father's side of the family, researchers say.

A new study finds that women often report fewer paternal cases of breast cancer than maternal ones, even though the numbers should be about the same. As a result, their breast cancer risk may be underestimated.

The researchers, writing in The American Journal of Preventive Medicine, said the findings had implications for both researchers designing studies and doctors treating patients.

"Primary care physicians might pay particular attention to getting information about the father's side of the family," they wrote, "since patients may not know that paternal family history is also relevant for their health."

The researchers, led by John M. Quillin of Virginia Commonwealth University, looked at the results of an earlier study in which more than 800 women who did not have breast cancer were asked about their family history of the disease.

About a quarter reported [cancer](#) on their mother's side or their father's side. But 16 percent reported maternal cases, while only 10 percent reported paternal ones.

There could be several reasons for the difference, the researchers said. It may be that men are less likely to be told about a breast cancer history in their family — or to pass the information on.

But the study also noted that many women did not know their fathers or have close relationships with them, and the researchers cited government reports that about 14 percent of children did not live with their fathers.